

Testimony of Peter Schultheis MA, Concerning My Opposition to the State's Legalization of Cannabis

SB 1085

I am writing today to voice my opposition about the legalization of cannabis here in Connecticut

I am a lifelong resident of Connecticut and earned my advanced degree in sociology from UCONN. Now, after having worked in the youth and family services field for 40 years, and, as part of my work, interviewing many young people who were active marijuana users, I am very concerned about our public lifting of the lid on Pandora's cannabis box. There exists a litany of assumptions being bandied about with this proposal of legalization of cannabis. As with the states that have legalized marijuana, they are experiencing many unforeseen and unintended consequences emerge. Truly, if legalized the common use of cannabis will be one huge THC drug trial and social experiment. As a state, I sense we are proceeding myopically when public health and safety, not the interests of the big green money machine, should be leading the conversation about cannabis. Just because a thing is useful i.e., tax revenue, does not make it good in and of itself. For the sake of brevity, I will simply out-line my broad concerns.

Will legalization really put an end to the black market? Have you seen the legal cannabis prices in Massachusetts? The last time I looked at the price for an ounce of legal cannabis it was \$300.00 an ounce at one location. While California may be more of an extreme example, it has been reported that as much as 80% of the marijuana sold there is derived from the black market. The assumption that the black market will be eliminated is a misbegotten assumption and I think I heard the argument recently that just because people are smoking cannabis anyways, why don't we just make it legal. This is not good discourse and a further attempt to normalize a substance that is still a federal schedule one drug for many reasons including its potential for abuse. Treatment professionals often refer to cannabis as the manana drug.

If legalized, it will probably mean that this will allow young people to have a much easier and quicker access to cannabis. Despite our best efforts, alcohol and tobacco still finds its way into our youth populations. Do you really think, if legalized, that, let us say your 22 year old cannabis user will be unlikely to not share or sell his or her cannabis with friends or others under 21 years of age? Currently, through a 2017 DPH Youth Health Survey, approximately 20.4% of high school students report that they had smoked cannabis in the previous 30 days. Legalization is not a harm reduction policy, it would certainly increase the potential of harm regardless of what kind of regulations that may be enacted. While some may argue that the overall rate of cannabis use may stabilize with legalization, it seems unlikely this rate will go down. In Colorado, for example, I believe the young adult population who now use cannabis since legalization there, has increased dramatically, which in turn, probably poses many future adverse events for those young users. Also, please witness the current vaping epidemic among our teens, who can also use some of those same vaping devices to smoke cannabis and some of its derivatives.

Often, cannabis is smoked or used in combination with alcoholic beverages which has a synergistic effect, placing a greater probability for impaired driving, and automotive accidents resulting in permanent injury or death. It should be noted that Connecticut ranks among the highest in the nation in

the percentage of traffic deaths involved alcohol impaired driving. Do we really want to introduce legal cannabis to the problem drinking crowd or alcohol drinkers in general.

I am truly wondering if there are any law enforcement groups or organizations in this country who thinks that the legalization of cannabis a good idea? Hiring more drug recognition police would do little to curb the problem other to arrest people and tie up the courts more. Legalization would mean just another set or subset of possible criminal activity and people engaging in risky and/or just plain stupid behavior when they are under the influence of THC.

Do we really want to possibly create a sub population of young people who may develop a life- long dependence on cannabis and diminish their life potential? Recent research posits a link of daily or heavy cannabis use to the development of psychosis. I thought our state is much more about valuing education, work force development and the manufacturing of jet engines, submarines and pharmaceuticals

While I don't want to comment too much here on the "gateway" drug theory, but THC has an addictive potential for some, and like many other drugs, if you use them early and often, you may set up a neurological pathway for abuse and long-term dependence.

It is the ultimate irony that our country's presidents wants to build a wall on the Mexican border and has declared a national emergency to keep out cannabis and other drugs, yet, some states blindly legalize cannabis without really looking at what the total impact will be with introducing a what can be an often pernicious substance into our culture.

Thank you so much for your time and patience on this issue but it is truly a watershed moment for the state and the overall health and welfare of our citizens.